

# Flu Claims Three More Lives In Delaware, Bringing 2016-2017 Total To Eight

**DOVER** – The total number of lab-confirmed influenza cases continues to increase in Delaware and the virus has now claimed three more lives, bringing the statewide total to eight deaths in the 2016-2017 flu season, the Division of Public Health (DPH) reports. The number of lab-confirmed cases is now 2,712 compared to 416 at this time last year.

All three deceased victims had underlying health conditions in addition to being infected with influenza. The third week of February, a 55-year-old New Castle County man, infected with Influenza B, passed away. The last week of February, a 64-year-old New Castle County man who was infected with Influenza A passed away. Most recently, a 65-year-old Kent County man infected with Influenza B passed away during the first week of March. All passed away at local hospitals.

The recent deaths push this flu season's fatalities ahead of last year's when there were six flu-related deaths among Delawareans during the entire 2015-2016 season. Last year, the flu season peaked later, and the first flu-related death didn't occur until March 14, 2016. Of the 2,712 lab-confirmed cases this year, 1,412 (52 percent) infected individuals are from New Castle County, 756 (28 percent) are from Kent County, and 544 (20 percent) are from Sussex County. These numbers reflect lab-confirmed cases and the actual number of flu cases in Delaware is likely much higher.

"We have said it before, but it is truly important for Delawareans to realize the flu can be unpredictable and deadly," said DPH Director Dr. Karyl Rattay. "We urge all Delawareans to stay home from work, school, or other

engagements if they feel sick with flu-like illnesses, to wash their hands regularly, to use hand sanitizer, to cover coughs and sneezes with a tissue, to take anti-virals as prescribed by their doctor, and to get vaccinated for the flu if they have not already done so.”

Those ages 25 and under continue to make up more than half (56 percent) of this season’s flu cases. However, those 65 and older make up 55 percent of those hospitalized for influenza-like illnesses.

Flu-like illnesses can come on suddenly and include fever, cough, sore throat, runny or stuffy nose, muscle or body aches, headaches, and fatigue. While more common in children, some people might also experience vomiting or diarrhea. Some people get complications including pneumonia, bronchitis, and sinus and ear infections. Providers can prescribe anti-viral medicines to make illnesses milder, hasten recovery, and prevent serious complications, hospitalizations, and death. Early anti-viral treatment works best, but may be beneficial for hospitalized patients up to four to five days after symptoms begin. Early anti-viral treatment can reduce influenza morbidity and mortality.

DPH recommends that people with flu-like illnesses call – not visit – their medical providers, who may be able to prescribe anti-viral medications by phone.

DPH suggests the following actions to protect vulnerable populations such as the elderly, the very young, pregnant women, people with underlying medical conditions like heart disease, diabetes, and people with weakened immune systems:

- If you are receiving treatment in a long-term care facility or in-home care, ask if the staff is vaccinated against the flu and if not, be certain all non-vaccinated staff members wear a mask at all times.
- Visits at home or in a facility should be limited if the

visitor is under age 16, has the flu, or is at risk of exposure to the flu. The illness can be transmitted prior to someone showing symptoms.

- If you are living with a senior and a family member contracts the flu, keep the two separate as much as possible and ensure everyone in the home follows sanitary precautions.
- Wash hands frequently with soap or use alcohol-based hand sanitizers, especially after you cough, sneeze, or touch your face.
- Cover coughs and sneezes with a tissue and dispose of the tissue immediately. If a tissue is not available, cough or sneeze into your inner elbow. Droplets from a sneeze can travel up to six feet.
- Stay home when sick and do not return to work or school until you are fever-free for 24 hours.
- Ensure all your loved ones are vaccinated against the flu.

Public Health officials encourage anyone 6 months of age and older, who has not yet been vaccinated against the flu to do so as soon as possible. DPH continues to offer the vaccine at four of the State Service Centers. Information for these sites can be found at <http://dhss.delaware.gov/dhss/dph/fluclinics.html>. Additionally, the vaccine is available through medical providers, pharmacies, and some grocery stores.

For more information on influenza prevention, diagnosis and treatment, call the Division of Public Health at 800-282-8672 or visit [flu.delaware.gov](http://flu.delaware.gov).

*A person who is deaf, hard-of-hearing, deaf-blind or speech-disabled can call the DPH phone number above by using TTY services. Dial 7-1-1 or 800-232-5460 to type your conversation to a relay operator, who reads your conversation to a hearing person at DPH. The relay operator types the hearing person's*

*spoken words back to the TTY user. To learn more about TTY availability in Delaware, visit <http://delawarerelay.com>.*

Delaware Health and Social Services is committed to improving the quality of the lives of Delaware's citizens by promoting health and well-being, fostering self-sufficiency, and protecting vulnerable populations. DPH, a division of DHSS, urges Delawareans to make healthier choices with the 5-2-1 Almost None campaign: eat 5 or more fruits and vegetables each day, have no more than 2 hours of recreational screen time each day (includes TV, computer, gaming), get 1 or more hours of physical activity each day, and drink almost no sugary beverages.